Pilot's Death Deepens Mystery in JFK Probe

WAS IT NATURAL, SUICIDE OR MURDER?

NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 25— Dist. Atty. Jim Garrisor hinted today that freelance pilot David W. Ferrie carried to his grave some secrets about President Kennedy's assassination.

Ferrie, 48, who described himself as a psychologist and private detective as well as a flyer, was found dead in his bed yesterday.

Garrison, the 6-foot-6 gun-toting prosecutor, called the death "apparent suicide."

But Garrison said he had not ruled out murder.

The coroner, Dr. Nicholas Chetta, said tests were not complete but death seemed due to a massive brain hemorrhage, with no sign of suicide except a curious, unsigned, undated note saying death was a "sweet prospect."

Garrison trained his sights on an apparent major inconsistency in Ferrie's death hour.

Chetta said rigor mortis had set in and death must have come sometime Tuesday evening.

But George Lardner, a reporter for Washington Post said he went to Ferrie's apartment about midnight and stayed until 4 a.m. Wednesday interviewing him.

Larder said in a copyrighted story that Ferrie told him he was convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald killed the President and acted alone.

Chetta said Ferrie's death had to occur before 4 a.m. But Lardner insisted he had visited with Ferrie until that hour.

Garrison said the time of death estimated by the coroner, and the time that Lardner said, was a major inconsistency in the case and was "one of the mysteries we don't understand."

Garrison said his investigators, who had Ferrie's apartment staked out secretly "for some time," saw the lights go out at 11 p.m., an hour before Lardner said he arrived for his midnight interview.

The investigators left when they saw the lights go off.

Ferrie was on the brink of producing information that could have been important, said Garrison, whose assassination probe — started long after the Warren Commission finished its work — has created an international sensation.

"We felt he was really now ready to talk candidly, to contribute to this important investigation," said Garrison.

Two days ago, Garrison was insisting that his effort to prove a conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy will result in arrests and convictions.

The President was shot in Dallas, Tex., Nov. 22, 1963. Garrison insists that a conspiracy to murder him was conceived in New Orleans.

No "credible evidence" of a conspiracy was found by the Warren Commission, which said Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald — a former New Orleans resident — acting alone.

Garrison said his office had planned to take Ferrie into custody early next week. Because Ferrie had expressed fears for his life, Garrison said he provided him a temporary hideout at a motor hotel here.

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy," Garrison said.

The nude body of Ferrie, who operated a flying service here, was found in the calm posture of sleep, covered to the chest by a bedsheet.

His second-floor apartment was in disarray. The American Flag was in the living room. Although 15 bottles of various pills were on a table, the coroner said no drugs were found other than those used for vascular disease.

He said Ferrie was born with a weak blood vessel at the base of his brain. It ruptured, producing a massive cerebral hemorrhage, Dr. Chetta said. Ferrie also suffered from high blood pressure and recently told a friend he had encephalitis (sleeping sickness).

UNSIGNED NOTE

An unsigned, undated note was found on the dining room table. The first paragraph said:

"To leave this life is, for me, a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable, and on the other hand everything that is loathsome."

Ferrie was brought into the scope of the assassination probe within 72 hours after Kennedy was slain. Garrison said he pulled Ferrie in for questioning at that time and

subsequently turned him over to the FBI, which took a statement and released him.

A New Orleans florist, Edward Voebel, had seen Lee Harvey Oswald's picture on television and reported that he and Oswald had served in a civil air patrol squadron under Ferrie. When authorities sought to question Ferrie, they found he had gone to Texas.